

M. B. W.

Presented to the Cong^t. Library,
by W. T. R. Harris.

MARY BOWDOIN WEBB.

PRINTED, NOT PUBLISHED.





THIS brief sketch of the young life and last illness of another dear child, whose loss the world cannot restore, is prepared in reply to numerous letters of inquiry, and with sincere gratitude for the many assurances of sympathy and affection which we have received.

MARY BOWDOIN WEBB was born at Augusta, Maine, January 6, 1856.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2012 with funding from
Congregational Library of the American Congregational Association



“ Day after day we think what she is doing,
In the bright realms of air ;
Year after year her gentle steps pursuing,
Behold her grown more fair.

“ Thus do we walk with her, and keep unbroken
The bond which Nature gives ;
Thinking that our remembrance, though unspoken,
May reach her where she lives.”

MAY—as we called her from the first—
was very young when she came to
Boston. As she grew older, she
very much resembled Winnie in her mental
characteristics,—resembled her so closely indeed
that much of what is said in the memorial of
the elder sister might, with small qualification,
be applied to her. She not only possessed
something of the same temperament, but in a
marked degree, the same mental alertness and
the same quick apprehension. To both be-

longed wonderful energy. To May a peculiar playfulness, and unfailing buoyancy of spirits. In study, the lesson was learned with the utmost ease and rapidity. In the solution of a hard problem, though Winnie might be asked to help a little, the end was reached with an arrow-like swiftness. There was also the same ease in committing anything to memory, and the same wonderful power of retaining what had been once committed. We recall, and enumerate with surprise, the great number of hymns, long poems, and chapters of the Bible which May could repeat—many of the chapters both in English and French.

And the accuracy and retentiveness of her memory were quite equalled by her power of recitation. She would sit at her mother's feet, half leaning against her knee, and repeat portions or the whole of "Paradise and the Peri," or "Grey's Elegy," or "Jerusalem the Golden," or the "Burial of Moses," with such a pathos as to bring tears to our eyes. As her fatal disease progressed, there was hung upon the wall in her chamber a "Silent Comforter." We noticed

that after it was turned in the morning, her eyes always sought and rested upon it. But not until after ten days or a fortnight did we really know that day by day those precious truths had been finding their way through the eye into the memory, to abide there forever. So that when those leaves were turned a second time, there were two copies of the sacred texts: one on the wall, and another in her loving heart.

As a little child she was very fond of books. This love for reading strengthened and increased till she would sit for hours completely abstracted and absorbed in an interesting book. And though she read with the greatest rapidity, she read with such concentration of mind and intelligence, that years afterwards she could give the plan and gist of the writer. During the long, weary months of her wasting confinement, books were her solace. First, every morning, God's holy Word, and then a book—some new book and somebody to read—to read rapidly, and almost literally by the day. We were more thankful than ever for books.

One thing peculiar to May was her love of animals, and her almost magic influence over them. She knew the call of many of the wild birds, and the note of almost every songster in the groves. At our little home in the country, where she spent three happy summers, she gained a complete mastery over almost every animal on the place. The little colt was taught to go to sleep with his head on her lap, and to run the length of the field at her call. Bird and beast seemed to recognize in her a mysterious sympathy. She was "pleased with sight of animals enjoying life," and kindness on her part did indeed "beget a tranquil confidence in all."

It was not so striking, perhaps, but certainly as interesting, to see her influence over little children. She always attracted them, and interested them, and won their hearts. They gave themselves up unconsciously but confidently to her control. They sought her to amuse them; they clung to her for instruction. During the last years of her bright and happy life, it was delightful to see how quickly the little strangers

who were met at the seashore, or at the mountains, became at home in her society.

In her religious life she was happy, natural and confiding. Her Sabbath School teacher for eight years, says that she was "a most devoted and interested scholar, almost always fully prepared upon the lesson, and evincing not simply a knowledge of the text, but a comprehension of the spirit of the subject." He adds, "May was a good example of a cheerful Christian—a free exercise of her mirthful, gushing spirit went hand in hand with her simple faith."

Always conscientious, and often deeply impressed by the truths of the gospel, it was not until the spring of 1871 that she seemed to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, in the full meaning of the Scriptures, and receive spiritual life. By advice of her parents, however, she did not unite with the church until January, 1873. During these eighteen months or more, the matter was frequently referred to, and the young disciple taught the significance of a public confession of her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Her union with the church she greatly enjoyed, and in such humble ways as were open to her served the Lord, showing a heart guileless and confiding, and full of the most generous impulses.

After her first partial recovery, she writes to a young friend, June 28, 1874: "Oh A., darling, what should I, what should any of us have done in this dreadful time, if we had not had the same dear, blessed Saviour, with whom our precious Winnie is, in perfect health and happiness, to comfort us? Just think! To know that one will never know sorrow, suffering or sin any more forever."

She writes July 12, 1874, to another young friend from whom she had been long separated: "I thought this lovely Sunday afternoon a good time to have a little talk on paper with my dear cousin, thinking all the time how very much pleasanter it would be to have a real talk with you. Let us pray the dear Jesus, M., if it is His will, to spare our lives, and let us meet on earth, or if not, meet in heaven where is my blessed angel sister Winnie. * * *

"I feel as if Jesus Himself had healed me, as much as if He had put His hands on me, as He did upon the sick when He was on earth. I pray to consecrate perfectly to the service of God the life which He has given me again.

"Dear M., don't you love the blessed Saviour? You must; I know you can't help it. Look on the 127th page of 'The Shadow of the Rock,' and read that poem—I say it to you, darling. The lines begin :

' I have a Saviour—He's pleading in glory—
 So precious, though earthly enjoyments be few ;
 And now He's watching in tenderness o'er me ;
 But, oh, that my Saviour was your Saviour too!
 For you I am praying—I'm praying for you ! ' "

Through the summer and the autumn, and into the winter, she kept up her tender activities in behalf of her young friends and others. But when again, disease, with a heavy hand, had laid a sore restraint upon her energetic and buoyant nature, the poor child yielded patiently, without a murmur or complaint. Her sufferings, at times, were very great and hard to bear, as well as exceedingly distressing to those about

her, but she never asked if there was nothing more that could be done. And when the change from city to country did not bring the restoration which we so anxiously longed for, and every new expedient which medical skill or parental love could devise resulted only in failure,—restriction following restriction, and disappointment following disappointment,—until the only nourishment that could be offered was a little wine-glass of milk once an hour, her hand gratefully received the slender supply, and her pale lips uttered thanks even for that. In the resignation, patience and gratitude which she maintained to the end, there was something very touching. One of the beloved pastors, whose sympathies were so freely given us at the end, summed all up in his prayer, “We thank Thee, O Lord, for Thy life in her.”

This dear child was stricken down with fatal disease in March, 1874. We could scarcely think it anything serious, so strong and well had she always been. But time showed us our mistake. For three long months she was con-

fined to her bed. But with the coming of the summer she rallied, and during July and August, at the sea shore and among the mountains, where she was taken by the physician's advice, she seemed to be recovering. During the autumn and early part of the winter she was able to take much exercise in the open air, and gave large promise of complete restoration. How happy we were in the prospect!

But in the latter part of January, 1875, a new and painful disease suddenly arrested her. During the month of February, however, she was relieved from the violence of the attack, and seemed to be regaining the comfortable condition which she had lost, though at times still suffering severely. One day better, and the next not quite so well, for several weeks she struggled on with a brave and constant heart. When Saturday came she looked forward to Monday, for a horse-back ride, which she greatly enjoyed; and when Monday came she felt like deferring the ride till another day. But in April the old disease appeared again, prostrating the dear child, and sadly darkening

our hopes. The fears which we had sometimes felt, seemed then to become a certainty—the disease had only been restrained, not removed. All the while it had secretly been making its fatal way. Spring brought back life and vigor and promise to the world without ; but to her, weakness, darkened windows, and oppressive confinement. She remained in the city till the heat and noise made a change imperative.

On the third day of July she was tenderly taken up and carried out of town into a high and bracing atmosphere, and into the midst of country scenes. These revived her for a time. Her natural love of the country was unabated. Oh, how she enjoyed everything—the flood of song with which the birds ushered in the morning ; the fresh verdure of the fields and the forests ; the silent beauty of the landscape ; the sweet-scented breath of the winds. To our surprise and delight, she claimed strength enough to be dressed and to walk. Ah, with what a tender, trembling delight we assisted her day after day to the lounge on the piazza. With

what contending emotions we helped her into the carriage once more for a few minutes' drive about the place. How thankful, how hopeful she was! It seemed almost as if the pool and the place of healing had been found. But this was only temporary. Disease, strongly intrenched and unconquerable, soon reasserted itself with terrible power, exhausting her strength, and driving her again to her bed. And so we advanced with burdened hearts and trembling step into the summer.

Some three or four weeks before her departure, the dear child was told plainly of the fears of the family—of their fears that she could not recover. It was evident that she had not contemplated such a result. Having recovered before, she was hoping to recover again. She received the information with a look of surprise. Seeing the troubled expression, her mother sought to break, in part, the effect of the thought, assuring her that we still hoped for her recovery, and, if that could not be, that she would long be spared to us, and that everything should be done for her restoration that could be

done. A week or more afterwards, when it was intimated to her that she might *soon* be taken from us, she was evidently affected. But when it was added, that God would arrange everything for us, and we must not be troubled, she replied, "Oh no, mamma, the Saviour must decide. I wish it to be just as He pleases." How beautiful the resignation: how firm and sweet the faith! There was no complaining of disappointments; no murmur against the providence of God; no bemoaning of an event so untimely and unexpected, but implicit confidence; "Jesus must decide." "Only I hope, if I am not to get well, I shall not be sick a great while." Poor child, she felt the weariness and the suffering of which she would not complain.

" Lord Jesus as Thou wilt ; Oh may Thy will be mine !
 Into Thy hands of love I would my all resign,
 Through sorrow or through joy, conduct me as Thine own,
 And help me still to say, My Lord, Thy will be done !
 Lord Jesus as Thou wilt ! All shall be well for me ;
 Each changing future scene I gladly trust with Thee,
 Straight to my home above I travel calmly on,
 And sing in life or death, My Lord, Thy will be done ! "

Friday, September 10th, she became more ill, and from that day the shadows deepened. Her little remaining strength failed rapidly, and we, who had been with her, night and day, during so many months, hoping against hope, felt a sinking at our hearts, and a stifling, indefinable conviction, that the end was near. Saturday, Sunday, Monday and Tuesday we pressed closer about the dear child, ready to give a part of our own lives, if thus we might detain her. We entered into the night of Wednesday with heavy hearts, and with increasingly painful forebodings. There was something unspeakably solemn and mysterious in the darkness. At a little past midnight the truth broke from our lips, "May, darling May, you are going to leave us—you are going to be with Jesus, and with Winnie." She heard it with perfect composure, as if by some messenger unseen the truth had been told her before. And when a father's grief could not be controlled, she turned her sweet face to him with a tranquil, trustful look, and said, "Oh, no, don't, don't, I am going to be with Jesus!"

“ One moment her pale lips trembled
With the triumph she might not tell,
As the sight of her life immortal
On her spirit’s vision fell.”

As the morning approached, she designated the little gifts which she wished us to have, with a wonderful thoughtfulness and self-possession, and mentioned those to whom she desired to send tokens of love and remembrance. All this was said with difficulty, in consequence of extreme weakness, and often only a syllable at a time, and we listened to her as to one speaking to us from the spirit-world. Oh, these hours of parting ! Then she said, “ Now pray.” “ And darling May, what shall we pray for ? ” “ Pray that we may all be resigned.” After a brief, broken prayer, she gave us each repeatedly her kiss—her farewell kiss, adding, “ You must forgive me all that has been wrong.”

Having been awake now for an hour and a half or more, and being exhausted by these efforts, she fell into a seemingly natural and gentle sleep. But after a short time she awoke, and as if in explanation of a smile that twice

came and spread over her face with a radiance like the coming of the morning, said, "Oh, I thought I was seeing Jesus!"

" And we read by that brightening smile
That the tread we may not hear,
Is drawing surely near."

Her mother said, "Darling May, what shall we do without you,—but you'll soon be all well." Clasp- ing the hand that had nourished her so long, she answered: "Oh yes, I shall soon be all well."

" I'm kneeling at the threshold, weary, faint and sore :
Waiting for the dawning, for the opening of the door ;
A weary path I've travelled, 'mid darkness, storm and strife ;
Bearing many a burden, struggling for my life :
But now the morn is breaking, my toil will soon be o'er,
I'm kneeling at the threshold, my hand is on the door."

Through the day, Thursday, she conversed less and less. Indeed her strength had become so reduced that she spoke to us only in the faintest whisper, or by a slight pressure of the hand. We watched and waited, but as those to

whom the last words had been spoken. With hushed and fainting hearts we entered into the darkness of Thursday night, feeling how impotent are human hands to relieve that extreme restlessness which, not infrequently, precedes dissolution. Often, very, very often the faint whisper came to our straining ears, "I'm not comfortable." No change of position could afford relief. All our devices were fruitless. Rest could only come with the end.

About seven o'clock on Friday morning the 17th, there was a further change. Tired, exhausted, life's work done, the dear child sunk into sleep which gradually deepened into "that sleep which knows no waking." And at half past seven o'clock in the evening, with a little moan and a faint restful sigh, her weary spirit took its departure for the home above. Another link is broken in the chain that binds us to earth, and another charm is added to the attractions of heaven.

On the following Monday afternoon, we took her to Forest Hills Cemetery, where, surrounded

with many sympathizing friends, we laid her beside the sister who had gone but sixteen months before, together to await the coming of the Lord:—the coming of the Lord “from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.” The sun was sinking to the western hills, when the choir of the church, standing by the rock, and beneath the sheltering arms of the oak, sang with unwonted tenderness, in that sanctuary of the dead, a hymn that May had asked for almost every evening during the last weeks of her sickness, beginning,

“ I heard the voice of Jesus say,
 Come unto Me and rest ;
 Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
 Thy head upon My breast :
 I came to Jesus as I was,
 Weary, and worn, and sad ;
 I found in Him a resting-place,
 And He has made me glad.”

As the last brief prayer was offered, a rainbow, we were told, flung its glorious arch across the dark clouds which were settling away in

the eastern horizon. We saw not "the token of the covenant," for our thoughts were with them before the rainbow that is round about the throne, and before Him that sitteth upon the throne, who was dead, and is alive again, and liveth forevermore.

Dear children, taken from our embrace and from the earthly home so early, to dwell in the mansions of the Father's house, you cannot know how your absence has changed the world. "Now God Himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you."

BOSTON, FEBRUARY 10, 1876.





